

The Barnstable Patriot

The Origins of Barnstable's Drinking Water

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One of our most critical components to life here in the Town of Barnstable lies just beneath our feet.

But have you thought of exactly *where* our drinking water come from?

All drinking water in the Town of Barnstable comes from the ground. We don't get it from reservoirs, lakes or reverse osmosis. We pump it from a thin layer of fresh water, an aquifer, that exists between the ground surface and sea level. And researching this key conservation issue—clean water in our estuary and beneath the ground—is the DNA at Three Bays Preservation Inc.

What is important to understand is that Cape Cod has only a single aquifer. Every well from every home owner, water district, or town municipality taps the same supply. You're walking, running and driving over your daily water supply. What should bother you is that your neighbor is also walking, driving, flushing, and dumping over your only source of drinking water.

Harvesting drinking water from below ground may seem obvious here, but a lot of municipalities around the country source their drinking water from above-ground surface environments including rivers and reservoirs.

We do not here, but think of the Quabbin Reservoir in Belchertown in Western Massachusetts. The Quabbin holds 412 billion gallons of water and is one of the biggest public water supplies in the United States.

This man-made structure was a public utility created in the 1930's and consists of two monstrous and artificially-constructed earthen dams. The Quabbin is fed by three branches of the Swift River, and by smaller amounts, the Ware River. Most importantly it is protected from contamination by thousands of acres of forest land which naturally filters, and consumes any contaminates entering the system. This system which supplies Boston and surrounding towns consistently ranks as one of the highest in reliability, safety and quality.

But here on Cape Cod, and in Barnstable, the water on your supper table was most likely beneath ground a short time ago.

For obvious reasons, water is directly connected to fire departments. And public water is provided to distinct Fire Districts in the Town of Barnstable for fire protection. Drinking water is the secondary benefit.

All Fire Districts have separate municipal Departments and they pretty much run like businesses. What's interesting to know is citizens of Barnstable pay different amounts for water than other citizens based on which Fire/Water district in which they live. It is also interesting to know citizens of Barnstable pay significantly less for water than citizens who get their water from the Quabbin. I hope to discuss the cost

benefit and relative quality of our present municipal fresh water system in future articles.

There's the Barnstable Fire District, the Centerville, Osterville and Marstons Mills Fire District, and Cotuit has its own Fire District. West Barnstable maintains its own Fire District, but they don't provide their own water as do the other Districts which maintain a fire arm. The Hyannis Fire District gets its water from the Town of Barnstable and really is only a Fire Department. That sounds funny, but it's true.

West Barnstable, Cotuit, and Centerville, Osterville and Marstons Mills Fire Districts do not chlorinate their supplies, although all water throughout the town is chlorinated, the pH is adjusted so the water is neutral, and there's a protocol for corrosion control so water networking pipes do not rot, unlike the pipes in Flint, Michigan. In West Barnstable, private wells provide water to homes and businesses.

So, what do we do with all this information? Study it, know that the Town of Barnstable is working hard to deliver clean drinking water, and in 2017, Three Bays will continue to advocate for clean water. The clean water that at this moment flows beneath our feet, and those surface waters throughout our watershed so deserving of protection for generations to come.

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Michael J. Egan is President of the Board of Directors of Three Bays Preservation Inc., an organization established in 1996 to advocate for the restoration and protection of West, North and Cotuit Bays, and the coves, ponds, rivers and streams that form our watershed and estuary. Learn more at www.3bays.org.

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